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ACTION ARA-00

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1276
INFO CIA WASHDC
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USCINCSO QUARRY HEIGHTS PM
AMEMBASSY CARACAS
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 BOGOTA 17389

USCINCSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PHUM, PINS, PTER, CO
SUBJECT: SEGOVIA MASSACRE UPDATE: INVESTIGATORS ON SITE:
STILL MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

REF: BOGOTA 17064

SUMMARY

1. (C) MANY MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS STILL SURROUND
THE EVENTS OF NOVEMBER 11, WHEN ARMED MEN KILLED 42
PEOPLE IN THE TOWN OF SEGOVIA, ANTIOQUIA DEPARTMENT.
PRESIDENT BARCO NAMED JUSTICE MINISTER PLAZAS TO HEAD
THE COMMISSION INVESTIGATING THE MASSACRE. THE
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COMMISSION INCLUDES THE HEADS OF SEVERAL OTHER
INVESTIGATIVE AGENCIES. NOT ONLY WILL THE COMMISSION
ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE
KILLINGS, BUT ALSO WHY THE SECURITY FORCES FAILED TO

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE
REVIEW AUTHORITY: JOHN L MILLS
DATE/CASE ID: 28 APR 2004 200400772

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REACT. TWO RIGHT WING GROUPS ARE THE MAIN SUSPECTS, INCLUDING A NEW ONE WHICH CLAIMED IT COMMITTED THE CRIME AS AN ACT OF VENGEANCE. THE UP MAYOR OF SEGOVIA RELEASED A VERSION OF THE ATTACK IN WHICH SHE ACCUSES THE POLICE AND ARMY OF COMPLICITY. PRESIDENT BARCO APPEARS DETERMINED NOT TO ADD THIS EVENT TO THE LIST OF CRIMES FOR WHICH NO ONE IS HELD ACCOUNTABLE. HIS NAMING OF THE HIGH-LEVEL COMMISSION REFLECTS THIS DETERMINATION AS WELL AS THE POLITICAL NEED TO BE SEEN AGGRESSIVELY PURSUING THE PERPETRATORS, WHICH MEANS WORKING OUTSIDE OF THE NORMALLY INEFFICIENT INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES.

MINISTERIAL-LEVEL COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE

2. (U) THE IDENTITY OF THE CULPRITS AND THE NON-REACTION OF SECURITY FORCES ARE THE MAIN ISSUES TO BE CONFRONTED BY A HIGH-LEVEL INVESTIGATIVE COMMISSION IN SEGOVIA, ANTIOQUIA -- THE SITE OF A RAMPAGE BY ARMED MEN WHICH LEFT OVER 70 CASUALTIES THE EVENING OF NOVEMBER 11 (REFTEL). THE COMMISSION WAS NAMED BY PRESIDENT BARCO AFTER A TWO HOUR MEETING OF HIS NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL ON NOVEMBER 15. THE COMMISSION IS HEADED BY JUSTICE MINISTER GUILLERMO PLAZAS, AND INCLUDES THE PRESIDENTIAL PEACE COUNSELOR, THE COMMANDER OF THE JOINT STAFF OF THE ARMED FORCES, THE DIRECTOR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE SECURITY (FBI-EQUIVALENT), AND THE DIRECTOR OF CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION. (NOTE: TWO PUBLIC ORDER JUDGES WERE SUPPOSED TO ACCOMPANY THE COMMISSION, BUT A PRESS REPORT NOTED THEY REFUSED TO GO
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BECAUSE THEY HAD NOT BEEN PAID FOR THE PAST TWO MONTHS.) SEVERAL HUMAN RIGHTS OFFICIALS WILL ACCOMPANY THE COMMISSION TO INVESTIGATE THE BEHAVIOR OF THE ARMY AND POLICE UNITS IN THE AREA.

WHICH PARAMILITARY GROUP DID IT?

3. (C) MOST COMMENTATORS HAVE DISCARDED THE NOTION THAT THE MASSACRE WAS THE WORK OF A GUERRILLA FORCE. THE MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT, CESAR GAVIRIA, RELEASED A STATEMENT FOLLOWING THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL MEETING WHICH READ IN PART: "WE CANNOT DISCOUNT ANY POSSIBILITIES; HOWEVER, THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACT, AND THE MANNER IN WHICH IT WAS ACCOMPLISHED, INDICATE THAT A PARAMILITARY GROUP WAS INVOLVED." INVESTIGATORS

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ARE NOW ANALYZING EVIDENCE POINTING TOWARD TWO PRIVATE RIGHT WING GROUPS. (NOTE: PRESIDENTIAL COUNSELOR FOR PEACE RAFAEL PARDO TOLD EMBOFFS NOVEMBER 17 THAT HE WAS CONVINCED THAT A "PARAMILITARY" GROUP WAS RESPONSIBLE. HE SAID THE GOC DEFINED "PARAMILITARY" AS "FALSE MILITARY", NOT INFERRING SECURITY FORCE COLLUSION.)

4. (U) THE FIRST GROUP, "DEATH TO REVOLUTIONARIES IN THE NORTHEAST (ANTIOQUIA)" (MRN), WAS MENTIONED IN REFTEL AND HAS BEEN OPERATING IN THE AREA FOR SOME TIME. THE GROUP HAS DENIED INVOLVEMENT. FURTHERMORE, IT HAS PREVIOUSLY LIMITED ITS ACTIVITIES TO INDIVIDUAL ASSASSINATIONS AND ONE RESCUE OPERATION OF CIVIL DEFENSE OFFICIALS KIDNAPPED BY GUERRILLAS (REFTEL). THE PRESS REPORTED THAT IN THE DAYS AFTER THE TRAGEDY, THE FOLLOWING GRAFFITTI APPEARED ON WALLS IN SEGOVIA: "NO TO THE WORK STOPPAGE - MNR," "WE WILL RETURN - THE REALISTS (THOUGHT TO BE ANOTHER NAME FOR MNR)," AND

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TAGS: PHUM, PINS, PTER, CO

SUBJECT: SEGOVIA MASSACRE UPDATE: INVESTIGATORS ON SITE:

"SEGOVIA, WE WILL PACIFY YOU, MNR." OTHER GRAFFITI, SIGNED BY THE SIMON BOLIVAR COORDINATING BOARD OF THE GUERRILLAS AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION ARMY (ELN), PROMISES REVENGE FOR THE KILLINGS, AND CALLS FOR OPEN WARFARE. THE MRN, HOWEVER, RELEASED A STATEMENT NOVEMBER 19 DISCLAIMING ANY RESPONSIBILITY AND PROMISING TO HELP BRING THE CULPRITS TO JUSTICE.

5. (U) ANOTHER PREVIOUSLY UNKNOWN GROUP, CALLING ITSELF SIMPLY "DENIS," CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE MASSACRE
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IN A CALL TO A MEDELLIN RADIO STATION. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, THE CALLER SAID THE KILLINGS WERE IN RETALIATION FOR THE DEATH OF DENIS LEON LOZANO PEREZ IN SEGOVIA IN MAY OF THIS YEAR. THE SAME REPORTER TALKED TO THE PATRIOTIC UNION (UP) MAYOR OF SEGOVIA WHO TOLD HIM THAT DENIS LOZANO HAD BEEN KILLED IN A CLASH WITH DEMONSTRATORS WHEN HE REFUSED TO SHUT DOWN HIS BAR DURING A GENERAL STRIKE IN THAT CITY IN MAY.

WHERE WERE THE SECURITY FORCES?

6. (U) THE ONGOING GOC INVESTIGATION INCLUDES LOOKING INTO THE ROLE, OR LACK THEREOF, OF THE SECURITY FORCES. ACCORDING TO VARIOUS ACCOUNTS, THE ATTACK BEGAN AT 7:00 PM WHEN AT LEAST TWO VEHICLES FILLED WITH ARMED MEN ENTERED THE MAIN SQUARE OF THE TOWN AND BEGAN SHOOTING AUTOMATIC RIFLES AND THROWING GRENADES. EVENING CHURCH SERVICES HAD JUST LET OUT. MANY PEOPLE WENT HOME AND OTHERS WENT TO NEARBY BARS AND CAFES ON THE SQUARE. BECAUSE MAIN SQUARES OF COLOMBIAN TOWNS ARE SOCIAL CENTERS ON FRIDAY EVENINGS, SEGOVIA'S WOULD HAVE BEEN FILLED WITH PEOPLE HAD IT NOT BEEN RAINING. (NOTE: POLICE STATIONS ARE ALSO SITUATED ON THE MAIN SQUARE OF COLOMBIAN TOWNS, AND POLICEMEN ARE USUALLY PRESENT, ESPECIALLY ON A FRIDAY NIGHT. BECAUSE SEGOVIA IS IN AN AREA OF ACTIVE GUERRILLA INSURGENCY, THE 20 OR SO POLICEMEN WOULD PROBABLY HAVE BEEN HEAVILY ARMED.) THE PERPETRATORS THREW GRENADES IN BARS AND APPARENTLY SHOT ANYBODY WHO DID NOT TAKE COVER FAST ENOUGH. AT LEAST 15 BODIES WERE FOUND IN THE SQUARE. HOW LONG THE SHOOTING LASTED VARIES ANYWHERE FROM PRESS ACCOUNTS SAYING IT WAS

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ABOUT AN HOUR, TO OTHER ACCOUNTS OF NO MORE THAN TEN OR FIFTEEN MINUTES. DURING THIS TIME THE VEHICLES DROVE
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SLOWLY UP AND DOWN SOME SIDE STREETS, IN NO APPARENT HURRY.

7. (C) DURING THE SHOOTING THE UP MAYOR SAID SHE WAS ON THE PHONE TO THE POLICE COMMANDER WHO SAID THE STATION WAS TAKING FIRE FROM THE CHURCH ON THE CORNER OF THE SQUARE. SHE SAID SHE DID NOT BELIEVE IT. (COMMENT: OVER ONE HUNDRED POLICE STATIONS IN SMALL TOWNS HAVE BEEN ATTACKED BY GUERRILLA FORCES SO FAR THIS YEAR. IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE POLICE, THINKING THEY WERE BEING ATTACKED BY GUERRILLAS, RETREATED TO THE STATION, AS IS NORMAL IN SUCH ATTACKS.)

8. (C) FORTY-FIVE MINUTES AFTER THE FIRST SHOTS WERE FIRED, ARMY TROOPS ARRIVED IN THE SQUARE. THE MAYOR SAID THEY DID NOT MAKE ANY ATTEMPT TO PURSUE THE ATTACKERS WHO WERE STILL SHOOTING UP OTHER PARTS OF TOWN, NOR DID THEY SET UP ROADBLOCKS OUTSIDE OF TOWN TO STOP THE KILLERS. OTHER ACCOUNTS SAY ROUTINE ROADBLOCKS WERE ALREADY IN PLACE ON ALL ROADS INTO AND OUT OF TOWN, AND THE ATTACKERS DROVE FREELY PAST THEM. (COMMENT: SEVERAL ACCOUNTS HAVE MENTIONED A MAJOR MILITARY BASE ADJOINING THE TOWN, SITUATED WITHIN YARDS OF THE ROAD WHICH THE KILLERS WOULD HAVE HAD TO USE. HOWEVER, DAO RECORDS INDICATE NO BATTALION SIZE BASE THERE. THE LARGEST FORCE STATIONED THERE WOULD BE A COMPANY OF PERHAPS 150 MEN, AND MORE LIKELY A REINFORCED PLATOON OF 30 TO 50 MEN.) SECOND BRIGADE COMMANDER JAIME SALCEDO, TOLD POLCOUNS IN BARRANQUILLA NOVEMBER 18 THAT THE TROOPS HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN AMBUSHED BY GUERRILLAS IN THE AREA. HE SAID STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES FOR THE MILITARY WAS NOT TO TAKE THE MAIN ROAD INTO TOWN WHEN ADVISED OF TROUBLE (A TEN MINUTE DRIVE), BUT TO GO BY FOOT THROUGH THE MOUNTAINS, WHICH NORMALLY WOULD TAKE AN HOUR.

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COMMENT

9. (C) NO ONE IS YET SURE EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED. THE
GOC IS WITHOLDING MOST SPECULATION PENDING THE OUTCOME
OF ITS INVESTIGATION. THE APPEARANCE OF THE GROUP
"DENIS" PROVIDES A SLIGHTLY MORE PLAUSIBLE EXPLANATION
FOR THE EVENTS THAN DOES THE SPECULATION ABOUT MRN.
NEWS REPORTS INDICATE FOUR ARRESTS HAVE BEEN MADE.
DESPITE REPORTS IN REFTTEL THAT MOST OF THE DEAD WERE
MEMBERS OF THE LIBERAL PARTY, SOURCES INVOLVED IN THE
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INVESTIGATION HAVE TOLD US THAT NOBODY HAS YET DISCOVERED A COMMON LINK AMONG THOSE TARGETED. SEGOVIA IS A GOLD MINING BOOM TOWN, AND WHILE MOST OF THE MINERS ARE NEWLY ARRIVED AND NON POLITICAL, THE AREA HAS LONG HAD COMMUNIST SYMPATHIES, ELECTING THREE OF THE FOUR UP MAYORS IN ANTIOQUIA LAST MARCH.

10. (C) THE REACTION OF THE SECURITY FORCES APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN THEIR STANDARD WAY OF RESPONDING TO WHAT THEY THOUGHT WAS A GUERRILLA ATTACK. NEVERTHELESS, THE GOC INVESTIGATION HAS NOT RULED OUT COMPLICITY ON THEIR PART EITHER.

11. (C) ON NOVEMBER 14, POLOFF QUERIED THE VICE MINISTER OF JUSTICE AND THE ACTING HEAD OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS COUNSELOR'S OFFICE ON THE EVENTS. BOTH COULD ONLY SHAKE THEIR HEADS. NEITHER HELD OUT MUCH HOPE THAT INVESTIGATORS WOULD SOLVE THE CASE; HOWEVER, THAT WAS BEFORE THE JUSTICE MINISTER HIMSELF WAS APPOINTED TO HEAD THE COMMISSION. BARCO'S NAMING OF THE HIGH-LEVEL COMMISSION REFLECTS HIS DETERMINATION NOT TO LET THIS BE ANOTHER UNSOLVED KILLING, AS WELL AS THE POLITICAL NEED TO BE SEEN AGGRESSIVELY PURSUING THE PERPETRATORS, WHICH MEANS WORKING OUTSIDE OF THE NORMALLY INEFFICIENT INVESTIGATIVE PROCESSES.

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